Impact of Social Media Marketing on Brand Equity of Small & Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in UAE

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Impact of Social Media Marketing on Brand Equity of Small & Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in UAE

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Crossref

Abstract

Purpose: To investigate the impacts of SMM on brands equity of SMEs in UAE.

Methodology: We administered a survey using SurveyMonkey.com to select 50 participants, with a developed questionnaire emphasizing the effects of SMM on brand awareness, brand loyalty, brand image, customer engagement, and brand equity.

Findings: Findings indicated that social media marketing (SMM) of SME brands in the UAE affect their brand equity, brand image and brand awareness. However, there was no sufficient evidence supporting the effect of SMM of SMEs in the UAE on brand loyalty and customer engagement. This implies that social media marketing activities of firms alone may not be enough to influence loyalty among customers towards the brand.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: The study assists business owners of SMEs in the UAE in evaluating the worthiness of investing in SMM to grow their customer base and maintain strong brand equity.

Keywords: *Social Media Marketing (SMM), Brand Equity, Brand Awareness, Brand Loyalty, Brand Image, Customer Engagement*

INTRODUCTION

Social media was originally perceived as a tool that allows people to interact and communicate with their families and friends (Holly Paquette, 2013). Today social media (SM) is known as a significant marketing means for businesses. Therefore, researchers around the world are interested in studying the impact of Social Media Marketing (SMM) on the different aspects of businesses. Due to the fast-paced advancement of technology, businesses have realized the effectiveness of exploiting SM to engage and connect with their consumers. According to Kaushik, (2012), social media as a marketing means that offers opportunities for businesses to market their brand, products, and services. Likewise, Bashar, Ahmad and Wasiq (2012) mentioned that businesses find the use of social media in marketing vital for increasing profits and strengthening their market position. As social media allows feedback and communication between the business and their consumers, this permits businesses to exploit social media platforms in changing customers' purchasing habits and behaviors and strengthening brand equity. An additional importance of SMM tool is low cost involved compared to the high returns (Ahmad, Bakar & Ahmad, 2019).

In the UAE, social media marketing (SMM) is widely utilized. Many well-known brands use SM platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook to improve their brand awareness and establish bond with their customers (Harris & Rae, 2009). Furthermore, small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) have been contributing vividly to the growth of countries' economies all over the world (Ilona et al., 2019). Due to their limited financial resources and keenness to reach customers before competitors, SMEs have also viewed social media as an important and affordable tool for building brand awareness, increasing sales, and building customer loyalty and trust (Homburg, Klarmann & Schmitt, 2010). SMEs in the UAE are also adopting social media marketing to meet the growing demand and increasing market competition. Furthermore, brand equity is defined by Alkhawaldeh, Salleh and Halim (2016) as "added value which a given brand name endows a product" (p. 723). It consists of three main areas: brand awareness, brand image and brand quality.

Due to the huge impact noticed by many companies, social media as a marketing tool has become an interesting topic for business people and researchers to investigate and measure its effects on different aspect of businesses such as financial returns as well as brand equity. Although, most of the past studies concentrated mainly on the impacts of SMM on large and multinational organizations that have already established a position in the market (Berthon, Ewing & Napoli, 2008), very few studies were conducted to investigate the impacts of SMM on brands equity of SMEs in the UAE. Hence, the main objective of this paper is to explore the impacts of SMM in improving the brand equity of SMEs in UAE. In addition, the study is anticipated to have several contributions, such as proving the role of SMM in promoting strong relationships between a business and their customers. It will assist business owners of SMEs in the UAE in evaluate worthiness of investing in SMM to grow their customer base and maintain strong brand equity. Also, this paper will investigate the said topic as it is one of the most negotiable topics in business world as well it is of the personal interest of the researcher

who is looking to be an entrepreneur in the future. Moreover, this study will allow the researcher to learn discover the extent to how much SMM can impact brand equity of SMEs in UAE.

Research Problem

Although researchers encourage businesses to increase their presence in social media platforms to gain customer's loyalty, there is limited research as to how social media affects brand equity of (SMEs) in the country. Therefore, as past studies have not examined the impacts of SMM on brands equity of SMEs, this study aims to address this gap and provide a more in-depth information about the topic using quantitative research to explore and investigate the impact of social media marketing on brand equity of SMEs in the UAE. Due to high rate of SM usage in UAE (GMI, 2021) and the significant changes in customer purchasing behavior brought by advancements in technology, it is therefore vital to build an understanding of how SMEs can take advantage of social media to attain its business objectives and maintain a competitive market position through promotion of brand equity. Moreover, this study also seeks to place emphasis on the need of building a social media network, despite the business being small- or medium-sized.

The information gathered and analyzed in the study will have a significant contribution to the growth of SMEs in the UAE, specifically when it comes to brand promotion. Furthermore, the importance of this study lies on finding whether social media is an effective marketing tool for promoting brand equity and consequently helping SMEs owners to leverage the technology for increased competitive advantage. The information presented in this study will also provide better interpretation of SMM for business owners, especially taking into consideration the benefits that can be gained from adopting the approach. Even in the academic field, this research will be a crucial source of information for researchers in exploring the advantages of SMM in relation to brands equity.

Research Objectives

The primary aim of the paper is to investigate the impacts of SMM on brands equity of SMEs in UAE. In that context, the research focuses on the three main aspects of brand equity: brand image, brand awareness and brand quality. Hence, four main objectives of this research as follows:

1. To determine whether SMM can have positive effects on image of SMEs brands in UAE;
2. To determine whether SMM can have positive impacts on brand awareness of SMEs in the UAE;
3. To identify if SMM can influence customer engagement and brand loyalty among SMEs in relation to brand equity; and
4. To explore the significance of brand equity in the business performance of SMEs in the UAE.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this study, findings of several past researches on influence of SMM on businesses are reviewed and considered as initial stage in paving the way to our research in order to summarize existing knowledge and assist identify the gaps in the information related to the topic which will help to build new hypothesis. Certain criteria have been taken into account when selection past studies and research such as accuracy and reliability of study, and author's background and experience, objectivity and aim of study, as well as currency of study (the time it was published) and also citation number (how many times the study was cited).

Social Media Marketing

SMM has grown dramatically over the past few years (Vinerean, 2017) and the pandemic of COVID 19 increased the usage of SM among people all over the globe (Samet, 2020). SMM is known as the marketing through various SM channels and networks or it is the promotion of goods and services through digital media (Bazarcı, 2020). Among the prominent social media channels are Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. Moreover, these social media platforms enable connection and interactions on a much more personalized and dynamic level than traditional marketing (Bazarcı, 2020). It has all the required marketing strategies established on SM platforms for advertisement, promotions and brand awareness of a products and services carried out in these social media networks (Yürük-Kayapinar & Kayapinar, 2021).

Other authors proposed new definitions to include what (SMM) constitutes. To illustrate, Felix et al. (2017) viewed SMM as a multidimensional concept that adopt combination of several types of social media tools to achieve the goals of an organization by creating value for stakeholders. The decisions made in this context were aimed strategic level; thus, covering the scope of SMM like defenders from explorers; structure such as from hierarchies to networks; and power ranging from monocracy to revolution (Felix et al., 2017 in Vinerean, 2017). An additional definition is from Yadav and Rahman (2017), wherein SMM is also known as a process used by many organizations, in which they establish, communicate and carry online marketing offerings through SM platforms. This process is used to establish and preserve relationships with stakeholder in order to improve stakeholder value through facilitating interactions, sharing data, and also personalized offerings. In addition, creating word of mouth about products to the stakeholders (Yadav & Rahman, 2017 in Vinerean, 2017). Moreover, SMM seeks to generate an impact on product or service to accomplish established goals of an organization.

Brands Image

Brands image is often associated with a brand, which covers several constructs. Over the years, there have been notable meanings provided to brand image, but Kotler's (2001) definition of image has been prominently cited as vital reference. As stated, Brands Image is a "set of thoughts, impressions and ideas a person holds about an object" (Kotler 2001, p. 273). Malik, Naeem and Munawar (2012) expanded and explained such definition in saying that brand image is a "mental representation of the brand based on the consumer beliefs, ideas and

impression of an individual" and perceived differently by both the organization and its targeted consumers or other stakeholders (p. 13069). In this sense, there are two types of brand image to consider: (1) perceived image or the way consumers or target audience view and interpret the brand; and the (2) desired image, which is the way company wanted to position the brand to match the consumer's perceived image (Malik, Naeem & Munawar 2012, p. 13069).

Different studies as well investigated effects of SM marketing on brands image. One is Bilgin (2018) who used the quantitative method to examine the effects of social media marketing activities on brands image, loyalty to brand and also brand awareness. Data from 547 brand followers were examined using structural equation modeling and found that SMM activities were have significant effect on brands image, which also influences brand loyalty. Meanwhile, Barreda et al. (2020) found after analyzing 236 Web-based questionnaires that social media interactivity and rewards help establish stronger brand image. In turn, brand image positively impacts emotional attachment between brand and customers. However, this research has a limitation as it has not examined other constructs such as brand page commitment to add further explanation on role of SM platforms in building brands image. Budiman (2021) as well explained that SMM such as electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), and online advertising have positive and significant effects on brands image. Therefore, the hypothesis states that:

H₁: Social media marketing has a positive effect on brand image of SMEs in the UAE.

Brand Awareness

Brand awareness plays important roles in consumer decision-making, market performance, brand equity and marketing mix (Zhang, 2020). Between the first and pioneering definitions of brand awareness is from Rossiter and Percy (1987), which says it is the buyer's ability to identify the brand to support the purchase decision. It is also considered as essential forerunner of brand attitude. Keller (2008) stressed that brand awareness is whether consumers can recall, recognize the brand in facing massive commodity brand competition (*cf.* Zhang, 2020).

Additionally, brand awareness is defined as the strength of a brand's presence in consumer's minds or their ability to recognize or remember a specific brand (Aaker, 1996). The social media has important functions for companies to attain brand awareness. In Elaydi's (2018) study, SMM companies used six dimensions as instruments or tools of marketing activities. These included: sharing of content, online communities, accessibility, and credibility. Same study concluded that a substantial impact of SMM activities via Facebook on brand awareness of mobile service brands. Yet, limitation of the study is focusing only on one type of social media platform which is Facebook which limits the comparison between different types of social media platforms. Therefore, the hypothesis highlights that:

H₂: Social media marketing has a positive impact on brand awareness of SMEs in the UAE.

Customer Engagement

Customer engagement is one of the main objectives of any institution. Customer engagement is the customer's behavioral indication towards a brand (van Doorn et al., 2010). Hollebeek (2011) defines customer's engagement as the customer's emotional and behavioral activities. Consumer engagement can occur at cognitive level when the customers think about a brand; or at an emotional level when the customers feel connected to a specific brand; and at behavioral level when the consumers engage with social media posts and advertisement about a brand (Gupta & Nair, 2021).

Consumer engagement can also create positive brand relations and eventually lead to brand loyalty and brand equity (Kuvykaitea & Piligrimieneb, 2014). Bowden (2009) has defined customer engagement as mental process which forms subjacent devices where customer loyalty can be maintained for consumer repurchase of a brand product or service. Boyle (2007) has identified 5 stages of customer engagement that leads to brands equity and these are as follows:

1. A newly-developed product has competitive features and characteristics.
2. Making brand awareness via marketing and communications.
3. Consumer interpretations of brand communications to create pre-consumption brand association.
4. The formation of post-consumption associations.
5. Customers repurchase and growing unique benefits of a product and its perception, which can lead to brand loyalty.

Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty is another important component of marketing usually targeted by companies to be given by its consumers. One of the initial definitions of brand loyalty is from Jacoby and Chestnut (1978) stating that it is a behavioral response from customers towards one or more brands from a set of brands. Aaker (1991) simply defines a brand loyalty as the measure of customer's attachment with a certain brand. Additionally, brand loyalty is seen as the customers' determination to purchase products or services from the same brand repeatedly (Tarkiainen et al., 2016). Närvänen et al. (2020) as well distinguished two dimensions of brand loyalty; the reflexive vs. routinized and the private vs. social. Loyalty in this concept was categorized in four metaphors, which are (a) a freedom of choice; (b) being conventional; (c) binding; and (d) acceptance.

Moreover, Aaker (1991) hypothesized brand loyalty in five tiers as seen in the figure below. The bottom part of the pyramid situates those have no brand loyalty and would often switch brands due to sensitivity to the price. This suggests that the brand has little influence on the consumer's buying decisions. The second level of the hierarchy is the satisfied users of the product as they are also habitual buyers. The third tier refers to the satisfied buyers with switching costs or those who do not want to risk changing the product. The fourth level in the hierarchy shows the loyal buyers.   The topmost tier is the committed buyer and they are proud

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users of the brand as they would recommend the brand they use to others.

Figure 1: Aaker's (1991) Model of Brand Loyalty

Furthermore, Sohail et al. (2020) found after analyzing 242 web-based survey administered through WhatsApp as well as private emails, that social media marketing has positive effect on brand loyalty and also brand trust. This leads to the hypothesis, stressing that the:

H₃: Social media marketing can influence customer engagement and brand loyalty among SMEs in the UAE.

Brand Equity

Brand equity was defined differently over time. Aaker's (1991) conceptualization of brand equity was more prominent and defined as "set of brand assets and liabilities linked to the brand, while the name and logo of a brand can add or subtract from the value provided by a product or services to a company and its customers." Keller (1993) defined brand equity in the consumer-based approach, where it serves as the attribute familiar to the customer and regarded as unique. However, Tavşan (2016) claims that the previous definitions of brand equity focused on the customer and company perspective and none emphasized profit—the expected and desired end product of the business from a brand. Therefore, a fresh definition of brand equity was given as "the sum of understanding and knowledge about the brand that makes it in the long-term more profitable compared with its competitors and in a long-term basis" (Tavşan 2016, para.7).

Social media has substantial relationship with the outcomes of brand equity, such as the activities of social networking and content communities' platforms (Lim et al., 2020). Moreover, the online or social media presence of a brand can serve as an asset of brand equity and eventually add value to the consumer and the brand (Smith, 2016). Many studies have

linked the positive effect of SMM to brand loyalty, along with other components such as brand image (Bilgin, 2018; Budiman, 2021). Hence, brand image is often perceived in literature as a vital driving force for customer loyalty (Zhang, 2015). Taylor, Celuch and Goodwin's (2004) study suggested that brand equity and trust are the most pivotal antecedents of both attitudinal and behavioral forms of customer loyalty. Hariharan et al. (2018) proposed that higher brand equity generally leads to higher consumer behavioral loyalty. This implies that brand equity promotes greater loyalty from customers.

Business performance is one of the indicators of a business that can be gained through brand equity via the social media efforts. Business performance can refer to the ability of the company to create the best use of the resources being managed in its business activities (Horak, Machova & Vrbka, 2021). It can also refer to the activities that are closely linked with the business competencies and aid in attaining business goals based on key performance indicators (KPIs) (Sebestova & Lejková, 2020). Brand equity can impact business performance as discussed by Haigh (2022) strong brand equity can translate into greater performance on several behavior metrics. Some of these metrics included (a) market penetration or the measure of the number of consumers that buy or use the product brand based on the total number of consumers that buy or use the brand in a certain time period; and (b) loyalty. This study therefore hypothesizes that:

H4: SMM can influence brand equity in the business performance of SMEs in the UAE.

Conceptual Framework

Based on literature review, we designed a frame work grounded on the theory that shows the (variable) SMM activities exploited by SME's in the UAE can positively affect brand image, increase brand awareness and customer engagement as well as customer loyalty which will eventually lead to increase brand equity of SMEs in the UAE. The model below is developed to show the relationships between the above variables which assist in gaining brand equity for SMEs in the UAE.
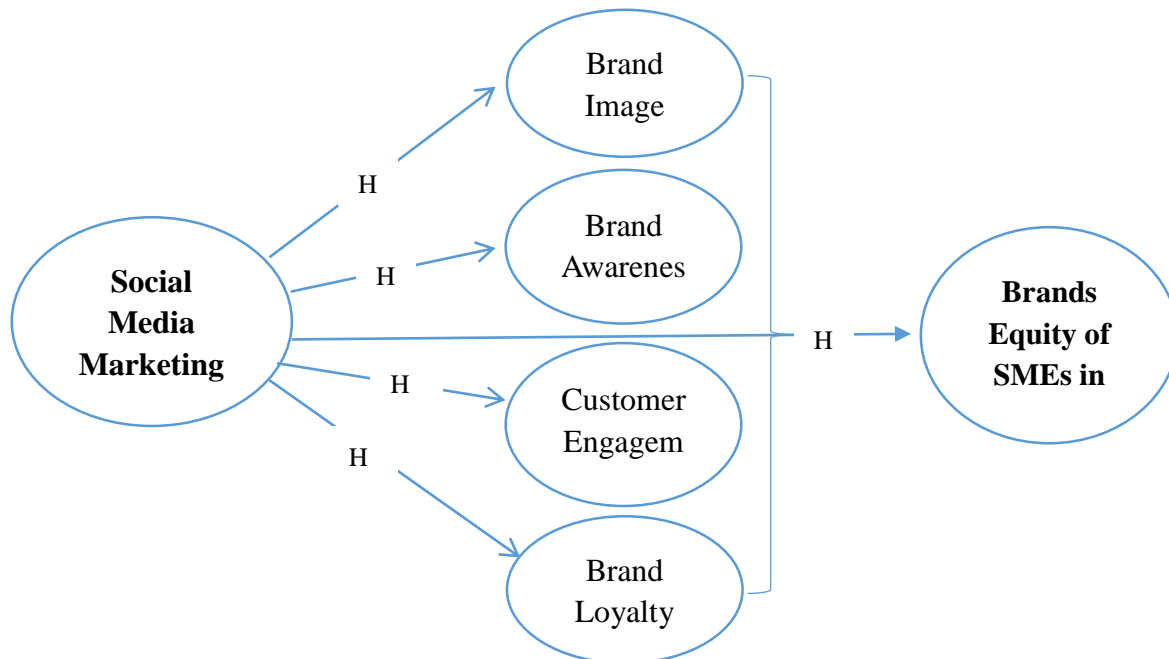
Figure 2: Conceptual Framework of the Research Study

METHODOLOGY

To reiterate, the core objective of the research is to investigate the effect of SMM on the brand equity of SMEs in United Arab Emirates. It will look into effects of SMM carried out by SMEs in the country on key areas of brand equity, including Brand Loyalty, Brand Image and Brand Awareness, as well as on customer engagement levels. There were five hypotheses tested in this study, namely:

> H1: SMM has positive impacts on brand image of SMEs in UAE.

> H2: SMM has positive impacts on brand awareness of SMEs in UAE.

> H3a: SMM can influence customer engagement among SMEs in UAE.

> H3b: SMM can influence brand loyalty among SMEs in UAE.

> H4: SMM can influence brand equity in the business performance of SMEs in UAE.

Research Design

Given the above-mentioned purpose of this study, the study adopts the quantitative research. Quantitative research involves quantification and analysis of some variables to obtain findings and results. It encompasses the use and analysis of statistical data using certain statistical methods and techniques in order to address the 'Who', What', 'How many', 'How Much', and 'How' inquiries should explain issues or phenomena (Apuke, 2017). The adoption of the quantitative research will enable this current study to understand and explain the impacts of SMM on brand equity, as well as on integral aspects of brand equity (e.g. brand awareness, brand loyalty, brand image and customer engagement).

As this study adopts the quantitative study, it also adopts the positivism research philosophy; as it is the common research philosophy used in making quantifiable observations and statistical evaluations. Moreover, the study also adopts the deductive research approach, since the study involves creation of hypotheses in guiding the collection and analysis of statistical data. In quantitative research, there are three common research designs – descriptive, correlational and experimental designs. This current study adopts the correlational design, which looks into the association between variables as it is appropriate for this study since it involves inquiries about the relationship of SMM and brand equity of SMEs.

Sample & Sampling Procedure

The UAE has a large number of SMEs operating within its jurisdiction, which contributed significantly to the country's economy. As a fact, statistics presented by the UAE Ministry of Economy (MOE) indicated that 94% of the total number of companies within the country are SMEs, and employed over one-third of the total workforce in the private sector (UAE Government, 2021). While there is no actual statistics available on the number of SMEs engaging in social media marketing, it is suggested that more and more SMEs have been increasingly adopting social media marketing for various purposes (Nuseir, 2018). Moreover, there are no actual statistics about the number of customers of these SMEs that engaged in social media marketing; hence, it is difficult to ascertain the actual population of this study. Nonetheless, this study's sample size is 50 people. The sample participants of this study were sampled through purposive sampling, based on selection criteria: (1) any age, gender, and nationality, (2) have made interaction or engagement (e.g. liking and commenting) in social media posts by SMEs, and (3) willing to participate in the survey. The sample participants are existing customers of three SMEs operating in the food and beverage sector in Dubai, which were on the list of the top 100 SMEs in Dubai.

Questionnaire Design

Collection of primary data was conducted using the survey questionnaire technique. The questionnaire was designed using SurveyMonkey.com and an online link was sent to the WhatsApp numbers of the participants for their convenience to complete the survey easily and in a time manner. The survey questionnaire integrated items the measure the six variables of interests in this study (e.g. SMM, brand awareness, brand loyalty, brand image, customer engagement, and brand equity) (*see* Appendix A). The questionnaire was divided into 8 sections – (1) demographics, (2) social media marketing, (3) brand awareness, (4) brand loyalty, (5) brand image, (6) brand equity, (7) customer engagement, and (8) brand equity. All of the items measuring the variables of interest were designed to elicit responses based on 5-points Likert scale (e.g. 1 – 'Strongly disagree' to 5 – 'Strongly agree').

Operationalization of Variables

- Demographic variables - Demographic variables of this study include age, gender, work (e.g. private or public sector), and nationality.
- SMM - In this research, SMM variable is described to be a multidimensional construct,

consisting of three constructs – advantageous campaigns, relevant content and updated contents.   Advantageous campaigns basically pertain to the organization of promotional customer engagement programs in social media, which can be advantageous for the brand as it would enable customers to become more updated with new products/services, as well as with marketing promotions of the brand.   Relevant content is the degree to which the contents posted online by brands are relevant not just to the brand but most especially to their customers.   Lastly, updated contents pertain to the degree to which the contents or any material and information of brands posted in their social media are updated.   Updated contents by brands often gain a lot of traction by customers, resulting to it getting shared across the social media network (Ahmed & Saeed, 2021).   In measuring the social media marketing variable, primarily three constructs, the measurement adopted in the study by Tung et al. (2017) was used. There were five items for advantageous campaigns, and two items each for updated and relevant content constructs (*see* Appendix A).

- Brand image – In this study, brand image is measured using the measurement adopted in the study by Severi and Ling (2013). Brand image measurement encompasses three items that ask about whether or not the brand has a differentiated, clean, and well-established brand image (*see* Appendix A).

- Brand awareness – In this study, brand awareness is measured using the measurement adopted in the study by Severi and Ling (2013). It encompasses five questions, including statements relating to them being aware that the brand or product appeared in social media, quickly recalling symbols and logos of brand, what the brand looks like in social media and so on (*see* Appendix A).

- Brand loyalty – In this study, brand loyalty is measured using the measurement adopted in the study by Severi and Ling (2013). The measurement encompasses five items including statements such as preference on this product/brand over the other brands, satisfaction with the brands, recommending the brand to peers/family and others (*see* Appendix A).

- Brand equity – In this study, brand equity is measured using the measurement adopted in the study by Yoo et al (2000). The measurement includes four items related to behaviors like purchasing the brand despite other brands having the same features and quality (*see* Appendix A).

- Customer engagement – In this study, customer engagement is measured using the measurement adopted de Silva (2019), which included 3 items. It measures behaviors of customers towards a brand in relation to commenting on and sharing posts of brands posted in social media (*see* Appendix A).

Reliability of Measurement

The survey questionnaire encompasses measurements that measure the variables of interests. All these questionnaires have high reliability, as based on the reliability tests carried out by past

studies that adopted these measurements (Table 1).

Table 1: Reliability Test for Measurements

Variable	No. of items	Cronbach's alpha	Study
SMM	9	0.708 -0.854*[1]	Tung, et al. (2017)
Brand Image	3	0.078	Severi & Ling (2013)
Brand Awareness	5	0.914	Severi & Ling (2013)
Brand Loyalty	5	0.821	Severi & Ling (2013)
Brand Equity	4	0.93	Yoo, et al. (2000)
Customer Engagement	3	0.759	De Silva (2019)

Data Collection Procedures

In collecting the data, the researcher directly messaged the selected participants using different social media (e.g. Twitter, Instagram). They were asked if they are willing to partake in a short survey about the brand they had engaged with. After responding to the researcher's initial message asking for permission for data collection process, the participants were sent with a link of the survey questionnaire. The researcher achieved a 100 per cent return rate. In analyzing the data and testing the hypotheses of this study, the raw data gathered from the survey were analyzed through Microsoft Excel Data Analysis Toolpak. Regression analyses were conducted to test the hypotheses of this study.

RESULTS

This section of the report presents the results of the study derived from the analysis of primary data gathered from the survey. The section includes descriptive statistics findings, and hypothesis testing findings.

Demographic Profile Analysis

Below table shows the demographic profile of the study participants.

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[1] *Note: alpha ranges for the three constructs measuring social media marketing – i.e., advantageous campaign, relevant content and updated contents.*

Table 2: Demographic Profile Frequency Table (N=50)

Demographic Variable		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	21	42%
	Female	29	58%
Average Age		29	54%
Nationality	Emirati	41	82%
	Filipino	5	10%
	Indian	3	6%
	Pakistani	1	2%
Work	Public/Government Sector	23	46%
	Private Sector	18	36%
	Student	6	12%
	Unemployed	3	6%

The Majority of the participants are female, accounting for 58 per cent of the sample size, while male participants represent 42 per cent. The mean age of the sample participants is 29.54 years, with majority of them are Emiratis (41, 82%). Others are either Filipinos (10%), Indians (6%), or Pakistani (2%). Majority of the surveyed participants worked at the public or government sector, accounting 46 per cent.   Eighteen participants are employed in private sector (36%), 6 are currently studying and are not currently employed at any public or private firms and two are unemployed (6%).

Descriptive Statistics Findings

Social Media Marketing

Below table shows the breakdown of responses of participants, and the average rating score for each item measuring social media marketing.

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Table 3: Frequency Table for Survey Items (N = 50)

Variables	Item ID	Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
	SMM1	The company/brand provide brand contents on several social media	0	0	0	2	48
	SMM2	The brand/company uses blogs and other social media tools to engage customers	0	0	6	35	9
	SMM3	The brand/company uses digital promotional tools to engage customers	1	2	23	18	6
	SMM4	The brand/company provides outrageous information of brand	0	5	15	14	16
Social Media Marketing	SMM5	The brand/company utilize powerful and persuasive stories to advertise products	4	5	21	12	8
	SMM6	The contents the brand provides are important source of information among your friends	1	12	12	11	14
	SMM7	The contents the brand provides improve knowledge about their product	4	2	15	21	8
	SMM8	The brand/company provides current and up-to-date contents in social media	1	1	3	28	17
	SMM9	The brand's contents are shared on social media	0	0	0	3	47

Table 4 below shows the average agreement scores for each item. Based on the data, the surveyed participants, on average, rated high agreement on the construct of 'updated contents',

with a mean score of 4.56. The surveyed participants, on average, agreed that that brand provides updated contents on social media, and such contents are being shared throughout the media. In terms of relevancy of contents posted on social media by brands, the surveyed participants, on average, exhibited moderate agreement that the contents provided by the brand improve their knowledge about the product ($\bar{x} = 3.5$), and important source of information among their friend ($\bar{x} = 3.54$). The surveyed participants, on average, also had higher average agreement scores on statements measuring advantageous campaign construct. Specifically, they had very high agreement on statement stressing the brand they are following provides contents on multiple social media platforms ($\bar{x} = 4.96$).

Table 4: Average Agreement Ratings of Social Media Marketing Survey Items (N=50)

Variables	Item ID	Item	Average Agreement Rating
Social Media Marketing	SMM1	The company/brand provide brand content on multiple social media	**4.96**
	SMM2	The brand/company uses blogs and other social media tools to engage customers	**4.06**
	SMM3	The brand/company uses digital promotional tools to engage customers	**3.52**
	SMM4	The brand/company provides outrageous information of brand	**3.82**
	SMM5	The brand/company utilize powerful and persuasive stories to advertise products	**3.3**
	SMM6	The contents the brand provides are important source of information among your friends	**3.5**
	SMM7	The contents the brand provides improve knowledge about their product	**3.54**
	SMM8	The brand/company provides current and up-to-date contents in social media	**4.18**
	SMM9	The brand's contents are shared on social media	**4.94**

Brand Image

The table shows the complete breakdown of participants' responses on statements/ items measuring brand image.

Table 5: Frequency Table for Survey Items (N = 50)

Variables	Item ID	Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Brand Image	BI1	This particular product/brand has a differentiated image in comparison with the other product/brand.	1	21	18	7	3
	BI2	This particular product/brand has a clean image.	0	0	3	17	30
	BI3	This particular product/brand is well established.	7	11	14	10	8

Based on the data, the participants, on average, agreed the most on the statement stressing that the brand has a 'clean image' [BI2], with a mean score of 4.54. However, the participants, on average, agreed the least on the brand having a differentiated image compared to other similar brands [BI1].

Table 6: Average Agreement Ratings of Brand Image Survey Items (N=50)

Variables	Item ID	Item	Average Agreement Rating
Brand Image	BI1	This particular product/brand has a differentiated image in comparison with the other product/brand.	**2.8**
	BI2	This particular product/brand has a clean image.	**4.54**
	BI3	This particular product/brand is well established.	**3.02**

Brand Awareness

The table shows the complete breakdown of participants' responses on statements/ items measuring brand awareness.

Table 7: Frequency Table for Survey Items (N = 50)

Variables	Item ID	Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Brand Awareness	BA1	I aware this particular product/brand that appeared in the social media	0	0	0	2	48
	BA2	I can recognize this particular product/brand in comparison with the other competing product/brand that appeared in the social media	0	2	2	26	20
	BA3	I know how this particular product/brand looks like.	0	0	1	31	18
	BA4	Some characteristics of the particular product/brand that appeared in the social media come to my mind quickly.	8	14	11	12	5
	BA5	I can quickly recall symbol or logo of the particular product/brand that appeared in the social media.	10	15	14	9	2

Table 8 below illustrates the average agreement ratings by surveyed participants on statements measuring brand awareness. The surveyed participants, on average, agreed the most on the statement stating that they are aware of the brand appearing on social media platforms [BA1], with an average agreement score of 4.96.   The participants, on average, also indicated higher agreement on statements stating that they can recognize the brand compared to competitors appearing on social media ($\bar{x}$ = 4.28, [BA2]), and know what the brand looks like ($\bar{x}$ = 4.34, [BA3]).

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Table 8: Average Agreement Ratings of Brand Image Survey Items (N=50)

Variables	Item ID	Item	Average Agreement Rating
Brand Awareness	BA1	I aware this particular product/brand that appeared in the social media	**4.96**
	BA2	I can recognize this particular product/brand in comparison with the other competing product/brand that appeared in the social media	**4.28**
	BA3	I know how this particular product/brand looks like.	**4.34**
	BA4	Some characteristics of the particular product/brand that appeared in the social media come to my mind quickly.	**2.84**
	BA5	I can quickly recall symbol or logo of the particular product/brand that appeared in the social media.	**2.56**

Brand Loyalty

The table shows the complete breakdown of participants' responses on statements/ items measuring brand loyalty.

Table 9: Frequency Table for Survey Items (N = 50)

Variables	Item ID	Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Brand Loyalty	BL1	I regularly refer this particular product/brand through the social media	3	12	20	7	8
	BL2	I will not switch to another product/brand that appeared in the social media next time	7	15	14	7	7
	BL3	I am satisfied with product/brand that appeared in the social media	2	2	13	25	8
	BL4	I would recommend this product/brand to others through the social media	7	8	17	4	14
	BL5	I usually use this product/brand as my first choice in comparison with the other product/brand.	8	14	20	4	4

Table 10 below shows the average agreement ratings of items measuring brand loyalty. Based on the data, it was indicated that the participants, on average, agreed the most on the statement stressing that they are satisfied with the brand ($\bar{x}$ = 3.7, [BL3]). They also have moderate average agreement on statement related to them recommending the brand through social media ($\bar{x}$ = 3.2, [BL4]). However, the surveyed participants, on average, agreed the least on the brand being their first choice compared to other brands ($\bar{x}$ = 2.64, [BL4]).

Table 10: Average Agreement Ratings of Brand Loyalty Survey Items (N=50)

Variables	Item ID	Item	Average Agreement Rating
Brand Loyalty	BL1	I regularly refer this particular product/brand through the social media	**3.1**
	BL2	I will not switch to another product/brand that appeared in the social media next time	**2.84**
	BL3	I am satisfied with product/brand that appeared in the social media	**3.7**
	BL4	I would recommend this product/brand to others through the social media	**3.2**
	BL5	I usually use this product/brand as my first choice in comparison with the other product/brand.	**2.64**

Customer Engagement

The table shows the complete breakdown of participants' responses on statements/ items measuring customer engagement.

Table 11 Frequency Table for Survey Items (N = 50)

Variables	Item ID	Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Customer Engagement	CE1	I usually take part in the brand's official account pages in social media	4	18	6	18	4
	CE2	I usually comment on the brand's official account pages in social media	7	5	19	14	5
	CE3	I usually share the contents posted by the brand in their official account pages in social media	1	7	24	12	6

Table 12 below shows average agreement score of items measuring customer engagement (Based on the data, it was indicated that the participants, on average, agreed the most on the

statement stressing that they often share contents posted by brand in their current social media account ($\bar{x}$ = 3.3, [CE3]).

Table 12: Average Agreement Ratings of Customer Engagement Survey Items (N=50)

Variables	Item ID	Item	Average Agreement Rating
Customer Engagement	CE1	I usually take part in the brand's official account pages in social media	3
	CE2	I usually comment on the brand's official account pages in social media	3.1
	CE3	I usually share the contents posted by the brand in their official account pages in social media	3.3

The table shows the complete breakdown of participants' responses on statements/ items measuring brand equity.

Table 13: Frequency Table for Survey Items (N = 50)

Variables	Item ID	Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Brand Equity	BE1	It makes sense to buy the brand instead of any other brand, even if they are the same	9	5	19	10	7
	BE2	Even if another brand has same features as this brand, I would prefer to buy this brand	7	17	11	7	8
	BE3	If there is another brand as good as this brand, I still prefer to buy this brand	2	18	7	13	10
	BE4	If another brand is not different from this brand in any way, it seems smarter to purchase this brand	7	5	16	13	9

Table 14 below shows the average agreement ratings of items related to brand equity. The data indicated that the surveyed participants, on average, agreed the most on the statement '*If another brand is not different from this brand in any way, it seems smarter to purchase this brand*', with an average agreement score of 3.24. However, the surveyed participants agreed the least, on average, on the statement stating that they would still prefer to buy the brand even though there are other brands that have the same features' ($\bar{x}$ = 2.84, [BE2]).

Table 14: Average Agreement Ratings of Brand Equity Survey Items (N=50)

Variables	Item ID	Item	Average Agreement Rating
Brand Equity	BE1	It makes sense to buy the brand instead of any other brand, even if they are the same	**3.02**
	BE2	Even if another brand has same features as this brand, I would prefer to buy this brand	**2.84**
	BE3	If there is another brand as good as this brand, I still prefer to buy this brand	**3.22**
	BE4	If another brand is not different from this brand in any way, it seems smarter to purchase this brand	**3.24**

Hypothesis Test Findings

This section of the study shows findings derived from the hypothesis testing. Table 15 below is the regression table derived from the simple linear regression analysis involving social media marketing (independent variable) and brand image (dependent variable). The findings indicated that the social media marketing is positively correlated with brand image, but the correlation is weak. This is indicated by the R value of 0.247. In addition, social media marketing explains only 6.1 per cent of the variation in the brand image, as indicated by R square value. It is also indicated that the results are significant, as indicated by the p-value less than 0.05 (**p value = 0.028**). This further suggests that the null hypothesis is rejected, and that there is sufficient evidence supporting the first hypothesis (H1) of this study claiming that social media marketing has a positive effect on brand image of small and medium businesses in the UAE.

Table 15: Regression Analysis for Social Media Marketing and Brand Image

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.247[a]	0.061	0.053	1.2566

ANOVA[a]						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	7.139	1	7.139	4.541	.028[b]
	Residual	100.91	48	1.602		
	Total	**108.039**	**49**			

Coefficients[a]						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.798	0.358		5.373	0
	SMM	0.343	0.163	0.267	2.12	0.028

Table 16 below shows the regression model findings derived from the simple linear regression analysis involving social media marketing (independent variable) and brand awareness (dependent variable). It is indicated that there is moderate positive correlation between social media marketing and brand awareness, as indicated by the R value of 0.549. Moreover, around 30.1 per cent of the variation in the brand awareness is explained by social media marketing (R square = 0.301). The positive correlation is also significant, as indicated by **p-value less than 0.05**. Therefore, it is concluded that the null hypothesis is rejected, and that there is sufficient evidence supporting the second hypothesis (H2) stating that <u>social media marketing has a positive impact on brand awareness of small and medium businesses in the UAE</u>.

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Table 16: Regression Analysis for Social Media Marketing and Brand Awareness

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.549ᵃ	0.301	0.289	1.3027

ANOVAᵃ					
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	43.632	1	43.632	25.578	<.001
Residual	105.684	48	1.694		
Total	**149.3196**	**49**			

Coefficientsᵃ					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	6.674	0.368		17.889	<.001
SMM	0.768	0.147	0.549	5.065	<.001

Table 17 below shows the simple regression analysis results involving social media marketing (independent variable) and customer engagement (dependent variable). The findings indicate that there is weak positive correlation between the two variables (R = 0.048). Social media marketing explains 23.04 per cent of the variation in the customer engagement. However, the results in not statistically significant, given the **p-value greater than 0.05**. This further suggests that the findings failed to reject the null hypothesis and that there is no sufficient evidence supporting the claim that social media marketing can influence customer engagement among small and medium businesses in the UAE (H3a).

Table 17: Regression Analysis for Social Media Marketing and Customer Engagement

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.048[a]	0.2304	0.021	1.14807

ANOVA[a]					
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	0.416	1	0.416	0.312	.565[b]
Residual	81.627	48	1.323		
Total	**83.023**	**49**			

Coefficients[a]					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	2.894	0.327		8.298	0
SMM	0.087	0.15	0.069	0.65	0.565

Table 18 below shows the simple regression analysis results involving social media marketing (independent variable) and brand loyalty (dependent variable). The findings indicated that there is weak positive correlation between social media marketing and brand loyalty, as indicated by R value of 0.396. 15.7 per cent of the variation in brand loyalty is explained by social media marketing. However, the results are not statistically significant (p-value = 0.654); therefore, the findings failed to reject the null hypothesis and that there is no sufficient evidence to support the claim that <u>social media marketing can influence brand loyalty among small and medium businesses in the UAE (H3b).</u>

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Table 18: Regression Analysis for Social Media Marketing and Brand Loyalty

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.396a	0.157	1.08645	1.14807

ANOVAª					
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	13.334	1	13.334	5.764	.654b
Residual	71.719	48	1.327		
Total	**85.343**	**49**			

Coefficientsª					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	2.874	0.327		8.298	0
SMM	0.097	0.14	0.071	0.85	0.654

Table 19 below shows the simple regression analysis results involving social media marketing and brand equity.   The findings indicate that there is a moderate positive correlation between social media marketing and brand equity.   This was evident in the R value of 0.646. In addition, social media marketing explains 41.7 per cent of variation in brand loyalty. The results are also statistically significant **(p-value < 0.05)**.   This further concludes rejecting the null hypothesis and that there is sufficient evident supporting the fourth hypothesis (H4) stating that social media marketing can influence brand equity in the business performance of SMEs in the UAE.

Table 19: Regression Analysis for Social Media Marketing and Brand Equity

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.646[a]	0.417	0.353	0.98654

ANOVA[a]						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	24.654	1	24.654	5.484	.000[b]
	Residual	60.578	48	0.993		
	Total	**85.043**	**49**			

Coefficients[a]						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	0.17	0.666		0.284	0.677
	SMM	0.571	0.324	0.8	2.958	.000

Discussions and Implications

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of social media marketing on brand equity of small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the UAE. One notable finding of this study is the positive and statistically significant relationship between social media marketing and brand image, which corroborated past findings of studies exploring the relationship (e.g. Bilgin, 2018; Budiman, 2021). There is also sufficient evidence found in this study supporting the claim that social media marketing has positive impact on brand awareness; hence, agreeing to the findings of past studies (e.g., Elaydi, 2018). Furthermore, the study also indicated that social media marketing has influence on brand equity, corroborating findings of past studies (e.g., As'ad, 2014).   However, the findings of this study failed to attain sufficient evidence on the direct impact of social media marketing on brand loyalty, which other studies found otherwise (e.g. Sohail, et al., 2020).   The possible reason for this is that the brand's marketing activities facilitated through social media alone may not be enough to influence customer's loyalty, given that there might be other factors that can have mediating effect on the relationship (Fetais, Algharabat, Aljafari, & Rana, 2022). The findings of this study could have some practical implications to SMEs. For firms to aim for improved brand equity, increased brand awareness, and brand image, they may need to improve their social media marketing campaigns by providing updated and relevant contents and posts in their social media. The marketing team of SMEs may also consider on offering advantageous campaigns. Overall, the significance of this study lies on contribution to the empirical literature on social media marketing and brand equity, addressing the gap in the literature about this topic within the context of UAE SMEs.

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, the study found evidence of the effect of social media marketing of SME brands in the UAE on brand equity, as well as on brand image and brand awareness. There were no sufficient evidence supporting the effect of social media marketing of SMEs on brand loyalty and customer engagement. As discussed in this study, social media marketing activities of firms alone may not be enough to influence loyalty among customers towards the brand; hence, future studies may explore more on this relationship, and include some factors that may have mediating effect to the relationship. In addition, this current study's findings are based on the analysis of a data gathered from a small sample size, which stemmed from the time restriction. Future studies may have to expand the sample size to increase the reliability more, and be more representative of the customer population of SMEs in the UAE that engaged in social media marketing.

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